

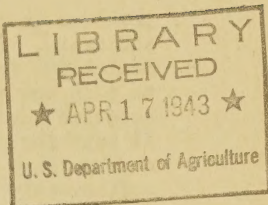
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SUMMARY OF NEIGHBORHOOD-LEADER CONFERENCE

Washington, D. C., March 3 to 6, 1943

Presented by

Dr. E. deS. Brunner 1/
Professor of Rural Sociology
Teachers' College, Columbia University



America's girding for the war effort has produced countless stories, some all but miraculous, of our success in converting our factories, our farms, our institutions, yes, and ourselves, to the purposes of this war.

In a sense, one of those stories has been unfolded in our midst these last few days. Some of us gathered here a year ago to plan for this thing which has come about in rural America -- this neighborhood-leaderssystem. All we then knew was that the war and its deprivations would change the pattern of Extension. With tires and gas worth their weight in bombs, our accustomed ways of operating were bound to be changed, restricted. Yet never was there more need for us to get down to the last farmhouse. How?

This neighborhood-leadership idea did not spring from the superior insight of the Federal staff. It was a common possession, and in some States the answer to that question of "how" was under way before our first neighborhood-leader conference -- even before Pearl Harbor. But in the main we were feeling our way a year ago. We did not even know how many "neighborhoods" there were in rural America. We guessed that we needed a million new leaders to do the job. We drew some charts, agreed on some principles, and wrote some suggestions, and I think I may say hopes, into the document that went out to the States. That document was too indefinite, some said. It gave no details as to what was wanted or how to operate. It was much too precise, said others, in that it had attempted to chart concretely something that in most States, and federally, did not exist 50 weeks of the year. At least here was something that was just for the duration, most thought, and could then be forgotten. And one or two of our directors forgot it even before the month was out, though not for long.

The System Is Organized

We all know what has happened. Somehow, most of rural America has been subdivided into its primary neighborhood groups. Over 600,000 rural men and women have been enlisted. Fourscore different types of programs have been attempted on a State basis. No one knows in how many cases the system has been used to handle acute local

1/ Dr. Brunner, in addition to his connection with Columbia University, has been associated during the past year with the Federal Extension Service as consultant, and through field visits has been in close touch with the development of the neighborhood-leader system.

problems in county situations, but we do know that has happened again and again. The system has proved itself sufficiently to have representatives from most of the States spend 4 days in these busy wartimes to plan how to make it better. There has been much testimony that skeptics have been converted. Indeed some of the converts are here. If anything stands out crystal clear from this conference it is, that what we gave birth to last March is so effective in its outreach and sufficiently rewarding in its results, that we now regard its essence as something that must be made permanent, even though it may have to be adapted to post-war conditions. It is something that can greatly increase the coverage of Extension in the service of rural America. Obviously, however, its first responsibility now is to the war effort.

You know this history as well as I, but to review it may be desirable in order to view our findings in this March of 1943, against a proper perspective. For what has been accomplished is a stupendous job of social engineering. With all due credit to other field and action agencies of the Department, this job has been so well done, has accomplished so much, that we can truthfully and soberly say that without it rural America would be far less well mobilized for the war effort than it is.

That is not to say the system is perfect. Of several estimates given of its effectiveness in States by members of panels or workshop groups, I heard none that claimed more than 80 percent; some were lower. But if perfection had been attained, there would be no need of this meeting.

Personally I doubt whether we are turning over a finished job to the Director. We have made very real, to some, surprising, progress, but like it or not, we must commit to the Federal staff the chore of producing an integrated, well-edited document for the field. Perhaps if Dr. Gallup applies the proper techniques for determining readability it can be understood in the "outback," as they say in Australia.

One of the characteristics I like in Extension is its ability to be self-critical, within the order, and we have admitted our mistakes in this project. We know our training has been faulty, and how could it help be with 600,000 persons to train in new tasks? Adequate service has not been given to the community and neighborhood leaders. Our selection of leaders has been faulty, and we have neglected to dignify them in their home localities. In many States we charge our failure to insufficient personnel, but we have not used to the full the manpower resident in the specialist staff. Perhaps most serious, the people of rural America do not yet everywhere recognize this system as their own to operate and to use. These weaknesses set our tasks. We are but a year old, and not even the Quiz Kids have completed their education. In these tasks we have the assurance first, that our rural people want to participate effectively in the war program, and second that they recognize in Extension the trusted and experienced agency for bringing information to those on the soil.

The Meaning of "Neighborhood"

As in our pre-war work, within the overall framework we have discovered diversity of methods, but we have also discovered that local participation in setting up the system has resulted almost always in more effective operation than otherwise. We have learned that we gain in efficiency if we organize natural, recognized neighborhoods, and divide them later, rather than selecting any 10 families and calling them a neighborhood. This word "neighborhood" has a real meaning to rural people. It is determined by similar interests and associations present, or even past as Mr. Adam showed, by topography, and other factors.

So, too, the word "community" has meaning, or if you are a New Englander, "township." Our stress has been so much of the neighborhood level that this must not be forgotten. Even the war will not change markedly the dominant pattern of the village-centered, farm community as the capital of rural America, even though it strengthens the neighborhood. The community leaders in this neighborhood system are therefore vital to us now and in the longer future. We talk of conserving this neighborhood system, as we should. But when tires and gas are again available, neighborhoods will tend to disintegrate as they did in the 1920's. We will need the community leaders then, both directly, and to help in the very conservation of the wide coverage achieved through the neighborhood-leader system. They can assist now, as at the county level, in helping to form policy and in servicing and training the neighborhood leaders. Really we should think of a neighborhood-community plan of organization rather than just neighborhood.

This raises, of course the question of the rural nonfarm population. A year ago we accepted that responsibility, but in this as in other things the working out of the procedures has varied in the States and according to agreements with the OGD. This is as it should be. We stand ready to do this job, but the speed with which it is undertaken must be left to the States, even perhaps to the counties. We need to differentiate, as we enter this area, between those programs applicable to all and those of use only to rural farm or rural non farm groups.

There are some who dream, more, there are a few who have begun to mold this system, neighborhood and community, into a broader community organization or council through which extension will play its part with others in meeting all the needs of rural people in their quest for the good life.

To that end we should use existing organizations in our work, whether it be simply passing on the word to people who come to church, or calling on them to take over a job the neighborhood and community need to have done. Also we may well draw all rural social organizations and groups into cooperation in our planning.

That may involve reciprocity. We must not swamp our system by making it a chore boy for every agency, but we could for instance, in these days of shortages of medical manpower, use the neighborhood

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leaders to announce if not promote Red Cross classes in home nursing. Clearance for such programs, however, should be secured from State and county committees of the cooperating agencies. There must be no compulsion.

Organization Must Fit Local Conditions

In the main the organization job from the States seemed well done as described by the panels - at least on paper. The problem is to fit this organization to work everywhere as well as it has in most places. The best organized plan lapses without incentive and leadership, and the best organization is that which best fits local conditions. At all levels there should be committees to guide the workers. These should include all major interests of Extension - youth, women, production, and so on.

We have used our neighborhood leaders variously as messengers, in the Paul Hovere sense, to help in quick, spot surveys or special services, as centers of information on programs and agencies, as promoters and effective organizers of programs, and to a lesser extent as demonstrators and helpers in the planning of the Extension war program. The many assigned tasks may be classified as having to do with production for home and national use, with conservation, as in scrap salvage, with cooperation in war activities, as in selling bonds, with health and morale, and as attitude builders.

We have found that neighborhood leaders participate in the programs in proportion to their understanding of them and accept their importance for their own areas. The task must be important enough to justify the time sacrifice. The "when" of doing it and the aid available should be stressed with each assignment.

We were not fully clear as to the relation of the new neighborhood leaders to the older type of volunteer leaders we have increasingly used in Extension since its founding. It seems obvious that those with prior experience can be employed for the more difficult educational tasks, for those programs that carry a heavier weight of subject matter than do many of the war emergency programs. Both groups must be used to the limit of their capacities.

Criteria for Choosing Leaders

But the fact that there are limits makes it essential that we have criteria for determining the choice, among our many tasks, of those that shall be referred to the community and neighborhood leaders. As among these criteria we suggested these following:

1. Vital to war effort.
2. Applicable to all rural families or all of major groups.
3. Timeliness and urgency.
4. Personal contact made in order to get high degree of concept and action.
5. Not too costly in time required of neighborhood leader.
6. Can be done by the leaders from standpoint of (a) time required, (b) amount of training.

7. Cannot be done better in any other way.

Given these or some comparable criteria, the question still remains: How many jobs will these neighborhood leaders undertake? One State said, one a quarter; another, one a month; two used "contacts"- four or five in the year with several jobs on each contact. There is a limit, but on the record it appears safe to go toward the upper end of the scale. The device of a State committee not only to guide the whole enterprise but also to establish priorities on jobs referred, proved useful in some States. Planning and channeling each job need to be carefully done with respect to every phase of work covered by our workshops, and should avoid assignments which in the nature of the case are highly controversial.

It is fitting here to suggest that the degree of organization we determine upon in any State, as indeed the degree of training for the leaders, must fit the types of jobs we pass on to our leaders, and these are conditioned by the time available for organization and training. For we must not forget that organization and administration, important and essential as they are, are designed only to facilitate operation.

Training for the Job

It has already been noted that the training we must give is conditioned by the jobs we assign. This requires job analysis, task by task. The training will vary according to past experience in the State and must also vary according to the educational background of our people - on which through the 1940 census we now have some index. The training program should be specific and include making the objective and need of each job crystal clear. It may involve subject matter or teaching how to demonstrate. It necessitates general instruction on the mechanics of successful meetings and home visits, of promotion especially among the laggards. It must relate each project to the general program and announce in advance or build on general press and radio information. It dare not fail to provide the motivation for an emotional commitment to each task. The training program should be geared to the teaching assets and ability of the trainer.

It must provide for a continuing flow of material to the neighborhood and community leader, for they must in each case be better informed than those to whom they bring their findings, if only to be able to answer objections.

It would be easy in this and other particulars to attempt to repeat the familiar patterns of Extension. It is well to approximate those that have proved effective in the past, but we have on our hands the manifold and pressing tasks of war, and so far as possible we must streamline. We may often have to be content with less than our best, with 80- or 90-percent quality, in order to come close to 100-percent quantity. This is no apology for sloppy work. The criterion is how to get the maximum results with the restricted time available. This will probably force us to depend increasingly on community leaders to emphasize more and more the community level.

This streamlining may involve use of the telephone, possibly on an all-neighborhood ring, meetings, our own or perhaps called for

other purposes, in order to reach more families in a given number of minutes, permit exchange of ideas, and generate enthusiasm.

And may I remind you that with all our talk of leadership training we need to pay attention to fellowship in our democratic society. It, too, is important. We need "The everlasting teamwork of the bloomin' whole."

Written Materials Must Meet Leaders' Point of View

To this end the training programs determined upon, we agreed, should be set up as in their counties by, or under control of, the agents with probably only general supervision and suggestion from the State. We could use school people or others with some experience or educational advantages. To this end the county should have a vital, illustrative handbook from the State, prepared after field contacts, giving training outlines and all types of illustrative materials based on the first year's experience. We all recognize that this influx of new leaders on the neighborhood level, many with no previous experience in Extension, creates new problems in training and also in the area of the printed materials to be furnished. These, by the way, we felt should come to the community and neighborhood leader through the county office in order ever to strengthen the tie between the leader and the organization. We used the familiar adjectives in expressing our desires with respect to these materials. They must be effective, simple, interesting, brief, readable. These terms are not easy to define, but the number of publications meeting these criteria is increasing, and illustrative samples were shown. Moreover, it is worth recording that, although such illustrations cannot be summarized, much practical work is going on here in the Federal office in applying to actual manuscript criteria developed, tested, and heretofore largely used only in the laboratories of the few experts in this area. One device in the line of materials did seem in quite general use - a State or county letter to all neighborhood leaders. All written material should be prepared from the point of view of the leader, not the professional.

Recognition and Support Determine Success

But no matter how good our organization, our training, and our materials, we were sure that the success of the system depended in some degree on the recognition and support received by the neighborhood leaders. Conditioning this is the skill with which the leaders have been checked or selected. People will recognize a failure only for what he is. Recognition can be facilitated by cards, pins, certificates, or what not, and these are valuable, but it involves more. It must come also from friends and neighbors where in part it will depend upon the amount and effectiveness of the service given. It should be accorded by the agents who, without being artificial or fulsome, should try to recognize the importance to the neighborhood and to the Nation of effective service in this capacity. This too will help to make the system better known and improve its functioning. County directories of agencies should have lines for filling in name of the neighborhood and community leaders. The encouraging of the leader to report on the needs, questions, and desires of his neighbors will help, especially if some can be followed up. Stories of successful work on national and

county levels in the local press will assist, and the Federal office should do some promotion nationally. Skillful and wide use of the Secretary's memorandum on this conference, may well be made.

The Specialist's Place in the Program

We recognized two sources of manpower wastage with respect to this neighborhood leader device. Not enough use has been made of youth; yet they have shown capacity to undertake many of the types of tasks for which we use this new device of ours. The girls who have been left behind, even more, some of the boys, are eager in this situation to help all they can. The other wastage appeared on the professional level. The specialist seems not to have been fully integrated into the operation of the system in some States. It was said that this type of person in the nature of the case lacks confidence and experience in dealing with the simple but more generalized tasks for which we have used neighborhood leaders. One director, not present, told me his specialists would ruin the whole idea by trying to ride each his or her own hobbyhorse down to every farm. On the other hand it was pointed out that the neighborhood leader system was now part of Extension and so was the specialist. In States with few specialists, some felt there was enough for each to do in other programs related to the war, and this appears clear in the production fields. On the other hand, it seemed unlikely that other specialists could continue life as usual for the duration. Some are even with us now in a new capacity, they are the State leaders of neighborhood leaders. Or, as one State county agent leader said, "our horticulturist has put his flowers in the showcase for the duration and is Victory Garden specialist now." Doubtless this requires work if not training for the specialist. Clearly there are unresolved issues here. For the administrator, the neighborhood leader device has been an added task - new, of course, but not different in kind. The agents perforce are generalists and must do a bit of social engineering. They can take the system in their stride if they will, and if they understand it. But the very function of the specialist, so essential in our normal educational activities, makes his relation to the subject of our deliberations a problem. We are all agreed that the specialist has a place and should help to find that place. Toward the solution of the problem the workshop has certainly contributed and so recently I will not recapitulate.

Evaluation of Results Will Pay

The final workshop on evaluation I also pass over far more lightly than its work deserves. You have just heard its results. The significance of its contribution lies in this: It insists and I believe properly, that even in wartime, rather because of the very urgency of the war, we must take time to check the effectiveness of what we are doing all up and down the line because it is so new. Therefore, obviously it needs to have its mistakes corrected and its operation improved. Essentially it advances the proposition that taking time to evaluate will save time, will pay. The workshop accepts the dictum, quoted several times, that this community and neighborhood-leader device is something too big to bungle.

Certainly this summary has left out much of value that was said by the panels and the workshop reports and inevitably so. I hope I have not omitted too many pet ideas as I certainly did not omit my own chief

pet, and I hope you noticed that I tried not to mention an idea more than once, even though it came up in more than one workshop, each with a different slant. Moreover, the workshops dodged some of the issues raised by the panels. For much of this we must trust the wisdom of the final editors of our proceedings and the common sense of the agent in adopting the suggestions offered.

Our panels and workshops have disclosed no uniform pattern of functioning. If this be confusion, make the most of it if you are critical. The war programs of other agencies have not been without confusion, but planes, bombs, guns, ships, and even rubber have been made and put to work. And we in this program have not been dealing with specifications for the processing of inert matter. Our job has been with human beings with all their limitations and assets -- something more difficult. Some of the confusion has come from misunderstanding that this conference should measurably have corrected. Some has come from the varying methods of working, the personal equations, if you will, of directors and staffs. But most of it has sprung from legitimate reasons. Just as Wyoming neighborhoods average 4 or 5 families each, and those in Massachusetts about 25, so there must be variations in other aspects of the program. Conditions and needs vary; methods must vary with them. But in the essentials there is no division. We are united in the purpose of serving the war effort. We are united in the effort to reach and enlist every last rural family in those enterprises in which all rural people can play their part in the winning of the war and the peace. We are united in striving to make this war device something rural people will make their own. We are united in allowing liberty of procedure and action within the several States in the carrying out of our objectives, provided they do their best to achieve. China, resisting a single definition of a coprosperity sphere, and occupied Europe, resisting a single superimposed idea as to the organization of that continent, help us to see that democracy means diversity of action with unity of purpose. Only when that diversity retards the reaching of the main objective and purpose is it alarming, and democracy has and uses its own methods of registering consensus in decision.

We are united finally, I believe, in our determination to use and adapt this tool, fashioned of a war necessity, for the purposes of peace. We have discovered that we are reaching those we never reached before. Of our leaders in numerous States, up to 30 and 40 percent had not previously been serviced by Extension; of the people, probably even more. Even in the neighborhoods themselves the folks are expressing their pleasure in once more being neighbors. That is something we can well highly resolve to conserve, and plan accordingly.

We shall win the war. But victory is not enough, not this time. Food will win the war and write the peace. When the Secretary said that he was thinking, and rightly, in international terms. But beyond victory, the one sure thing is the certainty of stupendous problems that will come here at home also, with peace. Far too many of our people on the land are fearful of that period. Fear never conquered anything. This is a global war. The peace too must be global, and America is part of this globe. When we no longer need to collect scrap, or sell bonds, or take labor surveys, or help farmers and their wives to adjust to city

high-school children as farm laborers, down to the last neighborhood, we in Extension can carry the discussion of the policies for which rural Americans should stand in our highly interdependent society. We can help to work out by democratic processes, how to extend the four freedoms to full fruition here on the soil we fought to free, here on the soil from which we sent forth our best to fight to free a world on the brink of slavery. What we did here a year ago, what we sought to strengthen this week, is, I trust, not an episode, but rather another step in the ongoing march of this democracy that is the very essence of our rural and of our national life.

